



**SUPREME COURT OF TEXAS PERMANENT JUDICIAL
COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES**

TRIAL SKILLS TRAINING STUDENT NOTEBOOK

DEVELOPED BY THE
CHILDREN'S COMMISSION

Fall 2024

CHILDREN'S COMMISSION

The Children's Commission was created by order of the Supreme Court of Texas in 2007 to help improve the judicial handling of child protection cases through improvements in judicial practice; child welfare policy and legislation; technology; training; and court improvement pilot projects. Chaired by Supreme Court Justice Eva Guzman, Children's Commission membership includes officials from DFPS and CPS, non-profit foundation and state bar leaders, private attorneys, legislators, judges, and other leaders in child protection. The Children's Commission also consults with an advisory group that represents the many and varied disciplines involved in the child welfare system. The Commission's mission is to strengthen courts for children, youth and families in the Texas child-protection system and thereby improve the safety, permanency, and well-being of children.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Children's Commission would like to recognize the leadership and support of Hon. Debra Lehrmann, Supreme Court of Texas Senior Justice and Chair of the Children's Commission; Hon. Rebeca Aizpuru Huddle, Supreme Court of Texas Justice and Deputy Chair of the Children's Commission; and Hon. Piper McCraw, Chair of the Commission's Training Committee and Jurist in Residence. Under their guidance, the Trial Skills Training has matured into virtual trainings as well as in-person trainings, both of which will serve to improve the caliber of legal services to Texas' children and families. We are grateful for their leadership.

The Commission would also like to thank the following contributing authors and editors who collaborated to produce this Trial Skills Training:

Tina Amberboy
Jamie Bernstein
Hon. Karin E. Bonicoro*
Renée Castillo-De La Cruz
Hon. Gary Coley*
Glenna Cordray
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Mauro Valdez
Hon. Elizabeth Watkins*
Trevor Woodruff*
LaRu Woody
Mark Zuniga

* Indicates individual is a founding member of the Trial Skills Training Faculty, whose generous commitment of time and ideas helped to develop the core curriculum of the program.

The Commission would also like to express its gratitude to Texas CASA and National CASA for providing the initial Harris-Price fact pattern, which formed the basis of this case scenario. Also, the Commission would like to thank Hon. Camile DuBose, who oversaw the initial development of this during her service to the Children's Commission as the Training Committee Chair. Additionally, the Commission would like to thank our Trial Skills Training Faculty, who continuously devote their time and share their expertise in order to improve the skills of child welfare practitioners throughout the state and ensure that all parties have access to high quality legal representation.

WELCOME

Dear Trial Skills Training Participants,

I want to extend my gratitude on behalf of the Supreme Court of Texas Children's Commission for your willingness to participate in the Children's Commission Trial Skills Training program to improve your legal representation skills, both inside and outside of the courtroom. Child welfare is one of the most important areas of law to our society and sense of justice. The right to family integrity is recognized as a constitutional substantive due process right under the Fourteenth Amendment, but it must be balanced with the state's right and duty to protect children and youth when their health, safety, and well-being are jeopardized.

When a family is involved in a child welfare proceeding, quality legal counsel is absolutely essential for all parties to ensure that the court strikes the appropriate balance between the rights and duties of all parties involved. A prepared and well-informed state's attorney can be instrumental in charting a legal course to help ensure timely permanency for a child. A well-trained parents' attorney can provide their client with information, guidance, and assistance to help them reunify with their child or identify as safe and suitable home with a relative. A zealous and educated child's attorney can mean the difference between a child languishing in foster care and finding a permanent home before turning eighteen.

While it is possible for attorneys to obtain a basic understanding of the issues a client may be facing, it is more difficult to accumulate trial skills in this practice area. In 2013, the Children's Commission created a hands-on training to assist all attorneys working on child welfare cases. This training will be presented under the exceptional leadership of our Jurist in Residence, Judge Piper McCraw, and in partnership with our experienced and knowledgeable faculty.

The need for quality representation for Texas children and families remains unwavering. Thank you for the time and energy you are dedicating to this training. The Children's Commission truly appreciates your commitment to improving the delivery of legal services to the children and families involved in child welfare proceedings across Texas.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jamie Bernstein", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jamie Bernstein

Executive Director, Children's Commission

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FALL 2024 TRIAL SKILLS TRAINING AGENDA

TST Contested Hearings Pilot Prework

To be completed by August 30, 2024:

- [Child Welfare Case Primer: Statutory Hearings and Current Issues](#) (1.25 hrs MCLE)
- [Reevaluating Reasonable Efforts Findings](#) (1 hr MCLE/.25 ethics)

To be completed by September 20, 2024:

- [Trial Skills for Child Welfare Cases: Laying Your Evidentiary Foundation](#) (1 hr MCLE)
- [Trial Skills for Child Welfare Cases: Making and Responding to Objections](#) (1 hr MCLE)

Training Day 1: Hearing Preparation

Wednesday, September 18, 2024

Please check your email for Zoom link

8:30 to 8:45 a.m.	Welcoming Remarks & Review of Program <i>Judge Piper McCraw, Jamie Bernstein, and Renée Castillo</i>
8:45 to 9:00 a.m.	Introductions of Participants, Faculty, and Commission Staff <i>Judge Piper McCraw and Renée Castillo</i>
9:00 to 9:30 a.m.	Building the Attorney-Client Relationship <i>Amanda Lockhart and Michele Surratt</i>
9:30 to 10:30 a.m.	Preparing for the Initial Contested Hearing: Requests for Court Ordered Participation in Services and Adversary Hearings <i>Tiffany Reedy and Belinda Roberts</i>
10:30 to 11:15 a.m.	Case Strategy Brainstorming Sessions: Identifying Good and Bad Facts for the Initial Hearing (Breakout Session) <i>TST Faculty</i>
11:15 to 12:30 p.m.	Lunch
12:30 to 12:35 p.m.	Welcome Back
12:35 to 1:20 p.m.	Burdens of Proof and Required Reasonable Efforts Findings <i>Judge Robert Falkenberg and Michele Surratt</i>
1:20 to 2:20 p.m.	Motions Practice in Child Welfare Cases <i>Judge Piper McCraw, Drake Mikeska, Diane Sumoski, and Tracy Harting</i>
2:20 to 2:30 p.m.	Break and Move to Virtual Breakout Rooms

FALL 2024 TRIAL SKILLS TRAINING AGENDA

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|-------------------|--|
| 2:30 to 3:15 p.m. | Case Strategy Brainstorming Sessions: Identifying Good and Bad Facts for the Final Hearing (Breakout Session)
<i>TST Faculty</i> |
| 3:15 to 3:20 p.m. | Return to Plenary |
| 3:20 to 3:30 p.m. | Closing Remarks, Announcements, and Evaluations
<i>Judge Piper McCraw and Renée Castillo</i> |

FALL 2024 TRIAL SKILLS TRAINING AGENDA

Tuesday, September 24, 2024

4:00 p.m.

Hotel Check-in

Embassy Suites by Hilton Dallas Market Center

5:30 to 7:00 p.m.

Reception

Embassy Suites by Hilton Dallas Market Center

FALL 2024 TRIAL SKILLS TRAINING AGENDA

Training Day 2: Adversary Hearing

Wednesday, September 25, 2024

8:30 to 8:45 a.m.	Morning Announcements and Introduction of Witnesses <i>Judge Piper McCraw and Renée Castillo</i>
8:45 to 9:30 a.m.	Demos: Laying Your Evidentiary Foundation and Objections <i>Judge Piper McCraw, Michele Surratt, Mark Zuniga, and Jack Sigman</i>
9:30 to 9:35 a.m.	Move to Breakout Sessions
9:35 to 10:20 a.m.	Practice Sessions: Drills on Laying the Foundation and Admitting Documents <i>TST Faculty</i>
10:20 to 10:35 a.m.	Break
10:35 to 11:20 a.m.	Conducting a Successful Direct Examination Lecture and Demonstration <i>Judge Elizabeth Watkins</i>
11:20 to 11:50 a.m.	Preparing for Impeachment of a Witness Using Prior Inconsistent Statements <i>Diane Sumoski</i>
11:50 to 12:50 p.m.	Lunch
12:50 to 1:00 p.m.	Welcome Back and Announcements <i>Judge Piper McCraw and Renée Castillo</i>
1:00 to 1:45 p.m.	Conducting a Successful Cross Examination Lecture and Demonstration <i>Amanda Lockhart</i>
1:45 to 1:50 p.m.	Move to Breakout Groups
1:50 to 2:05 p.m.	Case Strategy Sessions: Preparing for Direct Examination <i>TST Faculty</i>
2:05 to 3:05 p.m.	*Practice Sessions: Direct Examination of Caseworker and Kathy Price <i>Small group practice Sessions with Faculty critiques followed by one-on-one Faculty Reviews</i>
3:05 to 3:20 p.m.	Break
3:20 to 3:35 p.m.	Case Strategy Sessions: Preparing for Cross Examination of a Lay Witness <i>TST Faculty</i>

FALL 2024 TRIAL SKILLS TRAINING AGENDA

3:35 to 4:35 p.m. ***Practice Sessions: Cross Examination of Caseworkers and Kathy Price**
*Small group practice Sessions with Faculty critiques followed by one-on-one
Faculty Reviews*

4:35 p.m. to 4:40 p.m. **Move to Plenary**

4:40 to 4:50 p.m. **Closing Remarks**
Judge Piper McCraw and Renée Castillo

* Session is filmed. TST Faculty will review the video with participants and provide one-on-one feedback during the training and individual performances will be provided to each student for their independent review after the training concludes.

FALL 2024 TRIAL SKILLS TRAINING AGENDA

Training Day 3: Contested Bench Trial

Thursday, September 26, 2024

8:30 to 8:45 a.m.	Morning Announcements and Introduction of Witnesses <i>Judge Piper McCraw and Renée Castillo</i>
8:45 to 9:15 a.m.	Expert Witnesses: How to Qualify and Disqualify Expert Witnesses Lecture and Discussion <i>Doug Lowe and Jack Sigman</i>
9:15 to 9:35 a.m.	Demo: How to Qualify Your Expert Witness <i>Judge Elizabeth Watkins</i>
9:35 to 10:05 a.m.	Expert Witnesses: Using High Level Cross Examination of an Expert and Your Opponent's Exhibits to Your Advantage Lecture and Discussion <i>Mark Zuniga</i>
10:05 to 10:20 a.m.	Break and Move to Breakouts
10:20 to 10:40 a.m.	Case Strategy Sessions: Preparing for Direct Examination and Using Exhibits to Your Advantage with Your Expert <i>TST Faculty</i>
10:40 to 11:40 a.m.	*Practice Sessions: Direct Examination Using Exhibits with Pediatric Fellows and Parent Therapists as Experts <i>Small group practice Sessions with Faculty critiques followed by one-on-one Faculty Reviews</i>
11:40 to 12:40 p.m.	Lunch <i>Faculty and Student Debriefs and Afternoon Announcements</i>
12:40 to 12:45 p.m.	Afternoon Announcements <i>Judge Piper McCraw and Renée Castillo</i>
12:45 to 1:05 p.m.	Demonstration: How to Conduct a High-Level Cross Exam of the Opposing Expert Witness <i>Rob Galvin</i>
1:05 to 1:10 p.m.	Move to Breakout Groups
1:10 to 1:25 p.m.	Case Strategy Sessions: Preparing for Cross Examination and Impeachment of Experts Using Exhibits <i>TST Faculty</i>

FALL 2024 TRIAL SKILLS TRAINING AGENDA

1:25 to 2:25 p.m.	*Practice Sessions: Cross Examination and Impeachment of Experts Using Exhibits with Pediatric Fellows and Parent Therapists as <i>Small group practice sessions with Faculty critiques followed by one-on-one Faculty Reviews</i>
2:25 to 2:30 p.m.	Move Back to Plenary
2:30 to 3:15 p.m.	Child Welfare Case Bench Trials Lecture <i>Judge Watkins, Drake Mikeska, and Rob Galvin</i>
3:15 to 3:30 p.m.	Break
3:30 to 3:45 p.m.	Case Strategy Sessions: Preparing your Reasonable Efforts Argument for the Final Hearing (Breakout Groups) <i>TST Faculty</i>
3:45 to 4:45 p.m.	*Practice Sessions: Reasonable Efforts Arguments at the Final Hearing (Breakout Groups) <i>Small group practice sessions with Faculty critiques. No 1-on-1s this session.</i>
4:45 to 4:50 p.m.	Move to Plenary
4:50 to 5:00 p.m.	Closing Remarks to Participants, Announcement of Objections Winners, and Evaluations <i>Judge Piper McCraw and Renée Castillo</i>
5:00 p.m.	Program Concludes

* Session is filmed. TST Faculty will review the video with participants and provide one-on-one feedback during the training and individual performances will be provided to each student for their independent review after the training concludes.

PARTICIPANT PRACTICE SESSION INFORMATION

PRACTICE SESSION INFORMATION FOR TRIAL SKILLS TRAINING PARTICIPANTS

During the Fall 2024 TST Contested Hearing Practices Pilot (Contested Hearings Pilot), participants will focus on improving their everyday courtroom litigation skills. The first day of the Contested Hearings Pilot will take place on Zoom and will focus on client and hearing preparation. The following week, participants will hone their practice skills in a simulated Adversary Hearing on the first day of the in-person training and in a simulated Bench Trial on the final day of the training.

This document contains all the logistical information needed to prepare fully for the Contested Hearings Pilot. Please read the following details so that you will know what to expect and how to take full advantage of the faculty resources and live witnesses who will be available to assist you in this intense, interactive, three-day litigation training.

MEETING ROOMS:

Participants will meet in the Main Zoom Meeting Room on our virtual instruction day and in the conference plenary room on in-person training days for all lectures and demos and will be sent to their assigned Breakout Rooms for Strategy and Practice Sessions.

PRACTICE GROUPS:

All your practice sessions will take place in small groups where you will be among your colleagues. This will allow you to fully explore your case strategy and receive practice tips based on your client base. **Please take note of which practice group you are assigned to. As indicated in your TST application, while we make all efforts to place participants in their first-choice practice group, this is not always possible.** The attorney groups are as follows:

Attorneys Representing DFPS: Megan Barack, Allyssa Delgadillo, Michael Johnson, Elizabeth McNeil, Alicia Fortson, Karen Thompson and Kutter Trammel

Parent Attorneys: Daniella Gonzalez, Kaylee Long, Elizabeth Nicoll, Scott Edmonds, Shelly Shaw, Natalie Swinder, and Claire Wiczorek

Attorney Ad Litem: Kate Cooper Black, Lynna Dizon, Monica Kretzschmar, Jo Ann San Miguel, Rey Rodriguez, Fred Zoch, and Keyla Robertson

*** WHILE, IN REGULAR PRACTICE, AN AAL MAY ALIGN THEMSELF WITH EITHER DFPS OR A PARENT BASED ON THE FACTS AND THEIR CLIENT'S DIRECTION, IN THE INTEREST OF TIME DURING THIS TRAINING, THE AAL GROUP WILL BE INSTRUCTED ON WHICH POSITION THEY WILL BE ADVOCATING FOR IN EACH SESSION.**

PARTICIPANT PRACTICE SESSION INFORMATION

HEARING PREPARATION - SEPTEMBER 18, 2024

Zoom Link: <https://txcourts.zoom.us/j/86209759258>

Be advised that participants should complete their review of all the Harris-Price Case Materials prior to the first day of the TST Contested Hearings Pilot in order to best prepare for faculty led discussions on hearing preparation and case strategy.

1. CASE STRATEGY BRAINSTORMING SESSION: IDENTIFYING GOOD AND BAD FACTS FOR THE INITIAL HEARING

In this first strategy session, participants will breakout into their assigned discussion groups. The faculty will lead a brainstorming session with each group about the most strategic ways to present their legal and factual arguments in a contested Adversary Hearing. Participants should focus on documents related to the Ex Parte Hearing and Original Petition for Protection of a Child in the Harris-Price Case Materials to prepare for this session. AALs should assume that they represent all three children at the Adversary Hearing. Parent Attorneys may choose to represent Ms. Kathy Price, Mr. Ernie Price, Mr. Jason Harris, or the Unknown Father at the Adversary Hearing. Additionally, while not required, participant may find watching the ***“Successful Themes and Theories of CPS Cases”*** bonus lecture beneficial as they prepare.

Please have a few key case strategy points from your perspective (as a prosecutor, child’s Ad Litem, or parent’s attorney) to maximize your benefit from this Case Strategy Session.

*** PLEASE NOTE THAT WHILE, FOR THE PURPOSES OF THE FINAL HEARING PORTION OF THIS TRAINING, PARTICIPANTS ARE TO ASSUME THAT TMC OF THE CHILDREN WAS GRANTED TO DFPS AT THE ADVERARY HEARING, PARTICIPANTS SHOULD NOT OPERATE UNDER THIS ASSUMPTION AS THEY PREPARE FOR THE SIMULATED CONTESTED ADVERSARY HEARING.**

2. CASE STRATEGY BRAINSTORMING SESSION: IDENTIFYING GOOD AND BAD FACTS FOR THE FINAL HEARING

In the second strategy session, participants will breakout into their assigned discussion groups, and the faculty will lead brainstorming sessions on the most strategic ways to present your legal and factual arguments in a contested Final Bench Trial. Participants should focus on all remaining documents in the Harris-Price Case Materials to prepare for this session. AALs will represent Rose Price at the Final Trial on the Merits. Parent Attorneys will represent Ms. Kathy Price during the direct and cross examination practice sessions held on the second day of the in-person training and may choose to represent either Kathy Price or Mr. Ryan Smith during the Closing Argument Practice Session. Additionally, while not required, participants may find watching the ***“Successful Themes and Theories of CPS Cases”*** bonus lecture beneficial as they prepare.

PARTICIPANT PRACTICE SESSION INFORMATION

Please have a few key case strategy points from your perspective (as a prosecutor, child's Ad Litem, or parent's attorney) to maximize your benefit from this Case Strategy Session.

PARTICIPANT PRACTICE SESSION INFORMATION

CONTESTED ADVERSARY HEARING- SEPTEMBER 25, 2024

1. LAYING YOUR EVIDENTIARY FOUNDATION PRACTICE SESSION:

In preparation for this session, participants are required to watch the “***Laying Your Evidentiary Foundation***” and “***Making and Responding to Objections***” webinars available on the [TST landing page](#) prior to the in-person TST Contested Hearings Pilot dates.

Following a live demonstration on laying the evidentiary foundation and objections practice, this session is meant to help participants feel more at ease with their foundation and objection skills. Since this is a skill set that many attorneys have difficulty with (or at least anxiety about), participants will take turns laying the proper foundation for various types of evidence and making and responding to objections.

For the purpose of this exercise, participants will select one of the following exhibits and attempt to admit it as evidence using testimony of a live witness:

- Kathy Price’s text to the Caseworker
- Caseworker’s text to Kathy Price
- Kathy Price/Caseworker email exchange
- Kathy Price/Caseworker email exchange
- Medical records on each of the three subject children (3 sets of business records)
- Photographs of Rose Price (2)
- Psychological Evaluation of Kathy Price
- Counseling Notes on Kathy Price

Participants are instructed to assume the exhibits have been pre-marked and circulated to opposing counsel ahead of time for review and should not spend practice time on these tasks.

Following this practice session, please assume that all evidence has been admitted in the Harris-Price case. **Each participant is required to use one of the above exhibits during at least one of the subsequent direct or cross examination practice sessions.** This will allow participants to develop and practice using an exhibit through a witness to support their case theme and theory.

The requirement to use exhibits with witnesses is designed to give participants all an opportunity to build their skill level and confidence to do this successfully in courtroom practice.

Please note that it is important to learn your local rules on admitting evidence for in-person and virtual hearings!

PARTICIPANT PRACTICE SESSION INFORMATION

OBJECTIONS:

Participants are encouraged to practice making and responding to objections during the Laying the Foundation exercise and during all direct and cross examination practice sessions.

As Judge McCraw will elaborate “what happens in Trial Skills Training stays in Trial Skills Training” – so please don’t worry about making any mistakes!

TST Faculty will be asked to select an individual from each of the three practice groups (AALs, Parent Attorneys, and Attorneys representing DFPS) to recognize for the best use of/response to objections at the end of the training. These three individuals will receive a Starbucks gift card.

2. STRATEGY AND PRACTICE SESSIONS ON DIRECT EXAMINATION OF A LAY WITNESS:

Note: All Direct and Cross Examination practice sessions will be recorded as part of your training experience. The Commission will collect all recordings at the close of each day and can send participants their recorded sessions (for posterity and/or to review) at the conclusion of the training.

Participants will join their group breakout rooms prior to each of the remaining skills practice sessions for a strategy session. Faculty members will lead participants in a short group discussion before providing participants with some time to gather their thoughts and prepare for the practice session that directly follows.

From this point forward during the Contested Hearings Pilot, please consider using each strategy session to focus on these three queries:

- (1) What is your ultimate goal for this witness? How does that tie into your theme and theory?
- (2) What evidence needs to come in from this witness to support your goal?
- (3) How can you craft your questions for this witness accordingly?

Please have a few key questions or points prepared prior to each strategy session, understanding that these may change throughout the course of the training. This will ensure that participants get the most out of each strategy session.

Since each participant will receive only a few minutes to question their witness, faculty members will assist participants during the strategy session in selecting different topics to question their witness on so that the same line of questioning is not repeated the entire practice session.

For example, one participant may choose to ask questions about the parent-child visits, while another may choose to focus on the parent’s progress in services. In the past, attorney groups have met in the evening to brainstorm about and divide up various lines of questioning for the next day’s practice sessions.

PARTICIPANT PRACTICE SESSION INFORMATION

TIP: Consider using a transition sentence to help lead into your line of questioning such as “Let’s now discuss Ms. Price’s family plan of service.”

During the morning lectures, a live demonstration will show how to establish a lay witness’ credentials. Participants are to assume that the witnesses during the direct and cross examination practice sessions have already testified to their background and should not focus on these preliminary questions.

PARTY POSITIONS:

Parent attorneys will be advocating against TMC and complete a direct examination of a faculty member playing Kathy Price. Attorneys may choose to represent Ms. Price, Mr. Price, Mr. Harris, or the Unknown Father for this session.

Attorneys representing DFPS and Attorneys ad Litem (AAL) for the children will be advocating for TMC and will complete a direct examination of a caseworker acting as the Harris-Price CPI caseworker.

While outside of this training, some AALs might not align with DFPS in its attempt to again TMC of the Harris-Price children; please compose your direct examination questions for the caseworker accordingly for the purposes of practicing this skill.

Participants may choose to use one of the exhibits, all of which will have been deemed admitted into evidence prior to this practice session in furtherance of their line of questioning. Also remember to practice making objections and be prepared to respond if your line of questioning is objected to.

This practice session will be recorded, and the recording will be provided, upon request, for the participant’s personal review sometime shortly after the conclusion of the Trial Skills Training.

3. STRATEGY AND PRACTICE SESSIONS ON CROSS EXAMINATION OF A LAY WITNESS:

The above strategy session goals will guide the conversation as participants prepare their cross-examination questions. Faculty members will assist participants during the strategy session in selecting different topics to question their witness on so that the same line of questioning is not repeated the entire practice session.

During the morning lectures, there will be a live demonstration on how to conduct a cross examination of a lay witness.

PARTICIPANT PRACTICE SESSION INFORMATION

PARTY POSITIONS:

Parent attorneys will be advocating against TMC and will cross-examine the Caseworker. Parent Attorneys may choose to represent Ms. Kathy Price, Mr. Ernie Price, Mr. Jason Harris, or the Unknown Father at the Adversary Hearing.

Attorneys representing DFPS and AALs will be advocating for TMC and will cross examine Kathy Price.

While outside of this training, some AALs might not align with DFPS in its attempt to again TMC of the Harris-Price children; please compose your direct examination questions for the Respondent Mother accordingly for the purposes of practicing this skill.

During the cross examination of the witness, participants may choose to use one of the exhibits, all of which will have been deemed admitted into evidence prior to the practice session. Also remember to practice making objections and be prepared to respond if your line of questioning is objected to. If time permits, please also attempt to “approach” the witness with one of the admitted exhibits if it will assist with the line of questioning.

This practice session will be recorded, and the recording will be provided, upon request, for the participant’s personal review sometime shortly after the conclusion of the Trial Skills Training.

PARTICIPANT PRACTICE SESSION INFORMATION

TERMINATION BENCH TRIAL- SEPTEMBER 26, 2024

Note: All Direct and Cross Examination practice sessions will be recorded as part of your training experience. The Commission will collect all recordings at the close of each day and can send participants their recorded sessions (for posterity and/or to review) at the conclusion of the training.

* PLEASE NOTE, FOR THE PURPOSES OF THIS PORTION OF THE TRAINING, PARTICIPANTS ARE TO ASSUME THAT TMC WAS GRANTED AND SHOULD REFER TO THE HARRIS-PRICE CASE MATERIALS RELATED TO THE STATUS HEARING THROUGH THE TRIAL PHASE TO PREPARE FOR THE FINAL HEARING.

Additionally, participants may find watching the **“Successful Themes and Theories of CPS Cases”** and **“How to Build a CPS Trial Notebook”** bonus lectures beneficial as they prepare.

1. STRATEGY AND PRACTICE SESSIONS ON DIRECT EXAMINATION OF AN EXPERT WITNESS:

The strategy session goals listed above will guide the conversation as participants prepare their direct examination questions on day two of the Contested Hearings Pilot. Participants are encouraged to choose separate topics on which to question the witness.

There will be a Demo preceding this strategy session on how to establish an expert witness’ credentials, so please start your questioning with the assumption that your witness has already been qualified and has testified to her background.

PARTY POSITIONS:

Attorneys representing DFPS and AALs will advocate for Termination of Parental Rights as to the child, Rose Price, and will complete a direct examination of a Pediatric Fellow or Pediatric Nurse Practitioner playing Dr. Jane Jones.

Parent attorneys will advocate against Termination of Parental Rights and will complete a direct examination of a licensed therapist playing Ms. Price’s therapist, Consuela Counselor. For this session, all parent attorneys will be representing Ms. Kathy Price.

While outside of this training, some AALs might not align with the Department in its attempt to terminate Kathy Price’s parental rights; please compose your direct examination questions for Ms. Price accordingly for the purposes of practicing this skill.

During the examination, **Attorneys representing DFPS and AALs** may choose to use one of the children’s ER reports or one of the photos of Rose Price, all of which will have been deemed admitted into evidence prior to your practice session.

Parent’s Attorneys may choose to use Kathy Price’s Psychological Evaluation or the Counseling Session Notes, both of which will have been deemed admitted into evidence prior to your

PARTICIPANT PRACTICE SESSION INFORMATION

practice session. This is a good opportunity for attorneys to practice “handling” a document, “approaching” the stand, and questioning a witness.

This practice session will be recorded, and the recording will be provided, upon request, for the participant’s personal review sometime shortly after the conclusion of the Trial Skills Training.

2. STRATEGY AND PRACTICE SESSION ON CROSS EXAMINATION OF AN EXPERT WITNESS:

The same strategy session goals will guide the conversation as you prepare your cross-examination questions. TST faculty will again assist participants in choosing separate topics on which to question the witness.

This is the last practice session with live witnesses, and it is devoted to cross examination and impeachment of an expert and follows a lecture on Conducting a High-Level Cross Examination and a demonstration on the skill.

PARTY POSITIONS:

Parent attorneys will be advocating for reunification and will cross examine a Pediatric Fellow or a Pediatric Nurse Practitioner on the medical examination of Rose Price. For this session, all parent attorneys will be representing Ms. Kathy Price.

Attorneys representing DFPS will be advocating for Termination of Parental Rights as to the child, Rose Price, and will cross examine Kathy Price’s therapist, Consuela Counselor, who is in support of reunification.

AALs will be advocating for reunification in this exercise and will use their cross-examination skills to challenge the Parent Therapist, who has changed their mind about reunification.

***AALS: PLEASE NOTE THAT YOU ARE ADVOCATING FOR REUNIFICATION IN THIS PRACTICE SESSION!!**

Parent Attorneys: Cross Examination questions may revolve around inconsistencies in the medical exhibits. For example, the inconsistent description of the pattern bruising on Rose Price (the ER report on Rose Price says that the pattern bruises are on her left buttock, but the photo shows the bruising only on the right buttock), or about how accurately the doctor can testify to the age of Rose’s bruising or her diaper rash at the time of your ER examination, etc.

AALs: In this session, Ms. Counselor will not support Kathy’s reunification after all (despite earlier documentation and opinion that reunification with Rose would be fine as long as housing is in place, the therapist will say that she ultimately decided that Kathy just doesn’t have enough safety and stability in her relationships and housing to be successful. Additionally, Kathy did not mention her positive drug test for cocaine in her therapy sessions, and Consuela only became aware of the positive drug test and Kathy’s refusal to submit to the Department’s request for a

PARTICIPANT PRACTICE SESSION INFORMATION

subsequent hair strand test and sporadic submission to requests for random drug testing about a month ago).

For those wishing to practice with exhibits, participants may want to attempt to use Kathy Price's Psychological Evaluation or the Counseling Session Notes (already deemed to have been admitted into evidence) to impeach Ms. Counselor.

Please note that while outside of the training, some AALs might not align with the Respondent Mother's position that she should retain parental rights, for the purposes of practicing the skill, please compose questions for the Parent Therapist accordingly.

The change in position for this exercise is meant to help practitioners think about the case from both sides.

Attorneys representing DFPS: For this break out practice session, Consuela Counselor is still in support of a return of Rose to her mother, Kathy Price, or, in the alternative, that Kathy Price maintain possessory conservatorship of Rose. This is a good session to use Kathy Price's Psychological Evaluation or the Counseling Session Notes (already deemed to have been admitted into evidence) to impeach Ms. Counselor.

3. STRATEGY AND PRACTICE SESSION ON CROSS EXAMINATION OF AN EXPERT WITNESS:

Note: The Reasonable Efforts practice sessions will be recorded as part of your training experience. The Commission will collect all recordings at the close of each day and can send participants their recorded sessions (for posterity and/or to review) at the conclusion of the training.

Pursuant to [Tex. Fam. Code § 161.001](#), the court may order termination of the parent-child relationship in cases filed on or after September 1, 2023, only if the petitioner proves by clear

and convincing evidence that: (1) a ground for termination exists; (2) that DFPS made reasonable efforts to return the child to the child's home but a continuing danger in the home prevented the child's return; and (3) that termination is in the best interest of the child.

In this strategy session, TST faculty will lead a discussion aimed at assisting participants in identifying the best facts to support their reasonable efforts argument for a final trial where termination is being sought.

PARTICIPANT PRACTICE SESSION INFORMATION

4. REASONABLE EFFORTS PRACTICE SESSIONS:

In preparation for this session, participants are required to watch the “**Reevaluating Reasonable Efforts Findings**” webinar available on the [TST landing page](#) prior to the in-person TST Contested Hearings Pilot dates.

Building on the **Reevaluating Reasonable Efforts Findings** webinar, **Burdens of Proof and Required Reasonable Efforts Findings** live lecture, and a 15-minute strategy session on reasonable efforts arguments, participants will divide into their breakout groups and will be given 4 to 5-minutes to provide closing arguments focused on the reasonable efforts prong in a termination trial in the *Harris-Price* case.

For this simulation, assume a reasonable efforts determination must be made by the court, and that termination grounds and best interest of the child have already been argued.

PARTY POSITIONS:

Parent attorneys will argue that DFPS did not make reasonable efforts to return the child to the child's home and/or, that if DFPS's efforts were reasonable, there is not a continuing danger in the home that prevents the child's return. Parent attorneys may choose to represent either Kathy Price or Ryan Smith for this exercise.

Attorneys representing DFPS argue that DFPS made reasonable efforts to return the child to the child's home but a continuing danger in the home prevented the child's return.

AALs may align with either the parent or DFPS when providing the reasonable efforts argument of their closing statement as to the child, Rose Price.

Two faculty members will play the role of the judge. The judges will ask you to stop your closing statement practice at the 4 to 5-minute mark and give you immediate feedback and friendly coaching in front of your small group. Many former participants find this to be some of the most valuable time during their training, as your critique will assist you in improving your skills and your confidence, as well as provide you and your fellow colleagues with practice tips.

At least two additional TST Faculty Members will join each Breakout Room as an observer. This session will not include a 1-on-1 feedback session.

This practice session will be recorded, and the recording will be provided, upon request, for the participant's personal review sometime shortly after the conclusion of the Trial Skills Training.

CONCLUSION OF TRAINING: CONGRATULATIONS!

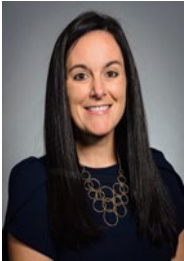
TRAINING COMMITTEE CHAIR



Judge Piper McCraw was appointed by Governor Abbott in 2015 to the 469th District Court in Collin County. Prior to her appointment by Governor Abbott in 2015 to the 469th District Court in Collin County, Piper McCraw was an assistant district attorney for Collin County where she was a misdemeanor court chief then later a member of a felony trial team. After leaving the Collin County DA's office, she joined McCraw Gantt, PLLC. In her experience, Judge McCraw has handled a wide variety of cases and tried over a 150 jury trials. She is a charter member and board member of both the Collin County Women Lawyer's Association and the Curt B. Henderson American Inn of Court. Judge McCraw is also proud to serve as Vice Chair and a Commissioner on the Texas Children's Commission as well as the Chair of the Children's Commission Training Committee. Prior to taking the bench, she was a member of the Collin County Criminal Defense Lawyer Association Board of Directors and the State Bar of Texas Grievance Committee. Judge McCraw received a BBA from Southern Methodist University, a JD from Texas A&M School of Law, and is double board certified in Family Law and Child Welfare Law by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization. She lives in McKinney with her husband, Mark, and three children.

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TST FACULTY BIOS



Amanda Lockhart is in private practice. She represents parents, children, and intervenors in cases involving Child Protective Services in Robertson and surrounding counties since 2011. She also represents clients in family law, criminal law, and general litigation. Amanda is a member of the State Bar of Texas Child Protection Law section, the Child Welfare Law Advisory Commission, and a part of various committees through the Children's Commission. Amanda earned her law degree from the University of Arkansas and is Board Certified by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization in Child Welfare Law.



Anna Saldaña Ford is Chief Legal Counsel for SJRC Texas & Belong (Belong). Prior to joining Belong, she served as Director of Regional Litigation with the Texas Department of Family & Protective Services (DFPS). Anna graduated from the University of Texas at Austin with a B.B.A. in Marketing in 1983 and began employment with the San Antonio Express-News. After 11 years in newspaper advertising, Ms. Ford attended law school and graduated *magna cum laude* in 1997 from St. Mary's University School of Law. Upon graduation, Ms. Ford served as an Assistant District Attorney for Bexar County. She later entered private practice, representing criminal defendants, as well as children and parents as an Attorney ad Litem in CPS cases. In 1992, Ms. Ford joined DFPS where she served as a Regional Attorney IV in DFPS' Region 8, covering San Antonio and its surrounding counties. She served as the Managing Attorney for DFPS' Regions 8 and 10 prior to joining State Office in 2015. She has extensive bench and jury trial experience. She serves on many committees aimed at improving courtroom practice and has presented at numerous conferences on CPS issues. Ms. Ford is board certified in Child Welfare Law by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization (TBLS) and is a former member of the TBLS Law Exam Commission.



Belinda Roberts currently offers mentoring and support to child welfare practitioners. Most recently, she served as an Assistant Attorney General as the lead civil attorney representing the State of Texas in human trafficking cases. Previously, she was in private practice and represented parents, children, and families in child welfare cases in Travis and surrounding counties for over 10 years. Belinda is an active member of the State Bar of Texas Child Protection Law and Family Law Sections, the Children's Commission's Parent and Child Attorneys Tool Kit Work Group and is a past Chair of the Court Appointed Family Attorneys (CAFA) Section of the Austin Bar Association. Belinda is also a member of the Travis County Women Attorneys Association and Texas Lawyers for Children. She earned her law degree from Rutgers School of Law-Camden and is Board Certified by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization in Child Welfare Law.

TST FACULTY BIOS



Judge Charles Griffin presides over the Gulf Coast Children's Court. The Court currently hears child protection cases in Harris and Matagorda Counties. Before his appointment Judge Griffin collectively represented the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services for more than 15 years as its Records Management Attorney and as a prosecutor in Potter, Brazos and Harris Counties. He also represented parents and children in child protection cases while in private practice in Dallas, Texas. Judge Griffin is a member of the State Bar of Texas's Child Protection Law Section. He is Board Certified in Child Welfare Law and serves as a member of the Child Welfare Law Advisory Commission of the Texas Board of Legal Specialization.



Diane Sumoski received her B.A. from Franklin and Marshall College, and her JD, cum laude, from Cornell Law School. She currently is the Director and Supervising Attorney of the W.W. Caruth, Jr. Child Advocacy Clinic and Institute for Children's Rights at SMU Dedman School of Law. As the Clinic Director, she represents and supervises law students in their representation of children in the child welfare system as the children's guardian and attorney ad litem. Her work for the Institute focuses on improving education outcomes for children in the child welfare system and, more recently, exploring the legal needs of youth who have aged out of the system. Ms. Sumoski has represented women and children in family law matters on a pro bono basis for virtually the entirety of her 30+ year legal career, including during her 26 years of practice at Carrington, Coleman, Sloman & Blumenthal, L.L.P., where she was a litigation partner. Ms. Sumoski served on the Board of Directors of the Dallas Bar Association from 2009-2016, has been listed in Best Lawyers in America since 2010, and has held numerous leadership positions in the Litigation Section of the ABA, including Director of its Public Service Division. Ms. Sumoski is a member of the Children's Commission's Training Committee, is Board Certified in Child Welfare Law by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization (TBLS) and serves on the TBLS Child Welfare Law Exam Commission.



Doug Lowe served as the elected Anderson County Texas Criminal District Attorney from 1999 to 2014. Since leaving office, Doug has focused on studying and investigating white collar crime and corruption. The Association of Certified Fraud Examiners certified him a fraud examiner in 2014. Prior to taking office as district attorney Doug practiced civil law in Palestine, Texas, and the Texas Board of Legal Specialization designated him as a certified personal injury trial lawyer. In 2015, Doug was appointed by Texas Governor Gregg Abbott as a Commissioner to the Texas Lottery Commission where he set policies for the Texas Lottery and supervised the Charitable Bingo Divisions. In 2019, to fulfill a dream of an island life adventure, Doug moved to the American Samoa and worked for the territory's Attorney General as a felony prosecutor. He returned to Texas in 2020 to establish a private law practice focusing on risk management, fraud investigations, and trials. His undergraduate degree and law degrees were awarded by the University of Houston. He

TST FACULTY BIOS

received a Masters of Law in Risk Management from the Texas A & M School of Law in December of 2018. Doug has been involved with the Trial Skills course since its inception.



Judge Elizabeth Watkins is an Associate Judge for the Child Protection Court of the Concho Valley. She was the former Family Justice Director for the Williamson County Attorney's Office. She has over 23 years' experience in the litigation and protection of children and families. She began her career with Child Protection Services as an investigator and adoptions worker, then served as an Assistant District Attorney in Anderson County for over 8 years. During her time with Anderson County, Elizabeth was responsible for the filing and litigation of all CPS cases, juvenile cases, and crimes against women and children. She has tried dozens of CPS cases in front of both the bench and juries, and prosecuted some of the toughest child assault cases, including first chair in capital murder trials. She previously served as a Regional Attorney for the Department of Family and Protective Services and is a member of the Supreme Court of Texas' Permanent Judicial Commission on Children's Legal Representation and serves as Trial Skills Faculty. Elizabeth has completed Trust Based Relational Intervention Course at the Karyn Purvis Institute. She has presented material for Texas CASA on trauma informed advocacy, served on lecture panels for trauma informed courtrooms, lectured for the Karyn Purvis Institute regarding TBRI in the Courtrooms, is a N.E.A.R. Science trainer and has testified before the Texas House Human Services Committee. Elizabeth was in the inaugural class to become Board Certified in Child Welfare. Ms. Watkins has 21-year-old twins, a son in graduate school for Psychology, and is married to her law enforcement husband, who investigates child crimes.



Judge Gary Coley has served as Judge of the 74th District Court since being elected in November 1998. Since being elected, Judge Coley has served through the Supreme Court of Texas Permanent Judicial Commission for Children, Youth & Families in various roles, and in 2016, he was appointed to serve as a Commissioner to the Children's Commission. Among other civic and professional activities, he is a member of the American Board of Trial Advocates (ABOTA), the Judge Abner McCall Inn of Court, and Rotary Club. Additionally, he was instrumental in the formation of the Heart of Texas Human Trafficking Coalition. Prior to being elected, Judge Coley was a partner at Frederick & Coley and served as a prosecutor in the McLennan County District Attorney's Office. From 2000-2004, he taught Juvenile Justice as an adjunct faculty member at Baylor Law School, and he resumed that role in 2018. Judge Coley obtained his B.B.A. from Texas A&M University and J.D. from Baylor University School of Law.

TST FACULTY BIOS



Jack Sigman joined the law firm of Castagna & Scott, LLP in 2022 where he defends clients involved in automobile and truck litigation. Prior to joining Castagna & Scott, LLP, he was at Gerite Snelson, LLP, and was previously in private practice in Travis County for 22 years. His areas of practice included family and juvenile law litigation. Jack has tried over 20 jury trials, 350 bench trials, and over 200 administrative hearings, including many child welfare matters where he represented parents and children by appointment. He is a founding member and life fellow of the Austin Bar Foundation, a member of the Austin Bar Association, and a director of the Austin Bar Association's Civil Litigation Section. Jack received his undergraduate from the University of Texas and Juris Doctorate from Texas Tech School of Law.



Kellie Price is the Special Projects Attorney for the Department of Family and Protective Services. She began practicing child protection law in 2013 as an Assistant County Attorney in El Paso. She joined DFPS in 2016 as a Regional Attorney and moved to the Appellate Unit in 2020. She is part of the inaugural class of attorneys to become Board Certified in Child Welfare Law by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization in 2018. Kellie serves on the CLE and membership committees for the Child Protection Law Section and the Texas Children's Commission's Training Committee. Kellie graduated from the University of Texas School of Law in 2007 and became licensed that same year. She is known for her love of Peloton and paper planners.

Photo
Unavailable

Laura Valdes is in her 8th year as an Assistant District Attorney in the CPS Division of the Bexar County District Attorney's Office. Prior to joining the District Attorney's Office, Laura was in private practice for 8 years. One of her primary focuses of practice included representing parents and children experiencing the child welfare system. She earned a Bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice from the University of Texas at San Antonio in 2003, a Juris Doctorate from St. Mary's School of Law in 2006, and she is admitted to practice before the Texas Western District Court.



Mark Zuniga is a staff attorney with the Texas Justice Court Training Center. Previously he was with the Travis County's Office of Parental Representation. Prior to his work in Travis County, Mark was an appellate attorney for the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. Prior to joining the Department, Mark was the Senior Attorney for the Civil Division of the Hay County Criminal District Attorney's Office, and before that Mark was in private practice. He graduated from the University of Texas School of Law in 1999.

TST FACULTY BIOS



Mauro Valdez is the Supervising Attorney for the CPS Unit in the Bexar County District Attorney's Office. He joined the District Attorney's Office in January of 2019 and currently oversees child welfare litigation for Bexar County. Prior to joining the District Attorney, Mauro was the DFPS Managing Attorney for Region 8 (San Antonio) for almost 4 years. In that capacity, he oversaw an office that provided direct representation for CPS in 26 counties, presented frequently at CLE trainings, and was also involved in reviewing pending bills during legislative session. He also provided legislative training updates to DFPS caseworkers and child/parent attorneys and served on the Hotdocs workgroup tasked with updating the Hotdocs form libraries. Mauro was a faculty member of the DFPS Trial Skills Training, which is provided yearly to regional attorneys. Prior to becoming a DFPS Managing Attorney, Mauro was a DFPS Regional Attorney in the San Antonio office for over 9 years. In that capacity, he represented CPS in 28 different counties. He also handled immigration issues for foster youth and was a regular speaker at CLE events on this topic. Prior to becoming a Regional Attorney, Mauro was in private practice for 2 years. Mauro is a member of the State Bar of Texas's Child Welfare Law Section and has been licensed to practice law in Texas since 2003. Mauro is a graduate of the Thurgood Marshall School of Law.



Judge Michelle Moore the presiding Judge of the 314th Juvenile District Court and the Administrative Judge of the Juvenile Courts. She also presides over the teen drug court called S.O.A.R., Sobriety Over Addiction and Relapse. Prior to taking the bench in 2019, Judge Moore worked at the Harris County Attorney's Office (HCAO) in the Child Protection Division where she was Court Chief of the 315th District Court. Before coming to the HCAO, she represented TDFPS in Cameron and Dallas counties. Judge Moore is from Houston, Texas, and she earned her undergraduate degree from Prairie View A&M University and law degree from University of Houston Law Center.



Michele Surratt has been a Managing Attorney for the Department of Family and Protective Services since September 2021 and was previously a Special Litigation Attorney since November 2006. She graduated cum laude with a B.A. in Psychology from University of Texas at Dallas and holds a J.D. from Texas Tech University School of Law. Michele has worked as a solo practitioner in Odessa, a Professor for Legal Assistance Program at Odessa College, an Assistant Ector County Attorney (1998-2004) and as an Assistant Collin County Criminal District Attorney (1996-1998). She has served on the Board of Directors of the Texas Young Lawyers Association and as President, Vice President, and Treasurer of the Ector County Young Lawyers Association. She has volunteered with the Odessa Crime Stoppers, where she was honored with an Award for Support and Dedication in 2003; the Odessa Teen Court, where she has served on the Board of Directors, as Treasurer and as a Volunteer Judge; the Center for Crisis Advocacy, where she has served on the Board of Directors; and the Safe and Drug Free Schools, where she has served on the Advisory Counsel. She has been recognized with the President's Award of Merit (2005-2006 and 2006-2007) and the Standing Ovation Award. She has also contributed to continuing education of the Texas State Bar as Course Director for Federal Court Practice (2006, 2007) and the New Lawyer Course (2007). Michele has presented at numerous conferences and trainings. She is a member of the

TST FACULTY BIOS

Children's Commission DFPS Representation Subcommittee and is the Vice-Chair of the State Bar of Texas Child Protection Law Section's CLE Committee.

Photo
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Rob Galvin received his B.A. and J.D. from the University of Texas. While in law school, he competed in numerous interscholastic competitions, and won a national title. Rob was inducted into the Order of the Barristers in 1999. During this time, he discovered his passion for advocacy; working for Broadus Spivey while under the tutelage of Francis Pan only served to further ignite that passion. Over the past 21 years, Rob has tried cases to the jury, many more to the court, and written and argued appeals.



Judge Robert Falkenberg presides over the Child Protection Court of South Texas, comprised of Bandera, Gillespie, Kendall, Kerr, Medina, Real, and Uvalde counties. He received his law degree from St. Mary's School of Law where he served on the St. Mary's Law Journal and received his B.A. in English from Texas State University. Prior to his appointment as an associate judge, Judge Falkenberg owned a private practice focusing primarily on child welfare and family law. Judge Falkenberg is active with the Supreme Court of Texas Children's Commission and is a Fellow of the Texas Bar Foundation. He has presented for Advanced Family Law, Texas District and County Attorney's Association, Texas District Clerk's Association, Children's Commission, and the Hill Country CASA Annual Ad Litem Seminar on child welfare issues.



William Drake "Drake" Mikeska is a Managing Attorney for the Department of Family and Protective Services, Region 8. He obtained his law degree from St. Mary's University School of Law in 2012 and is certified by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization in Child Welfare Law. In 2023, Drake joined the Children's Commission Trial Skills Training Faculty.



Tiffany Reedy has served as the Managing Counsel for the Child Protection Services and Disability & Elder Law Divisions at the Harris County Attorney's Office since January 2021. She was an Assistant County Attorney for Harris County from December 2008 until January 2021 and was a Regional Attorney for the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services for five and a half years prior to joining the Harris County Attorney's Office. Tiffany has presented on numerous topics related to the practice of child welfare law and is a featured presenter on the Texas District and County Attorney's Association ("TDCAA") *Fundamentals of Child Welfare Law* online training course. She obtained a J.D. from Texas Southern University, Thurgood Marshall School of Law. Tiffany has been a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc since 1996.

TST FACULTY BIOS



Tracy Harting is a TBLS and NACC certified Child Welfare Law Specialist. Tracy is an attorney in private practice representing parents, children, and families in Travis, Williamson, Caldwell, Hays, Bell, Gonzales, Guadalupe, and Comal counties. She is a former foster parent and an adoptive parent of two. Her practice areas include child welfare, administrative, and LGBT law. Tracy obtained a B.A. from Southwestern University, a J.D. from the University of Houston, and an M.P.A. from Texas A&M Corpus Christi.

IN MEMORIAM
Clint A. Harbour
August 14, 1975-August 30, 2024



Clint Harbour served as a member of the Children's Commission Trial Skills Training Faculty from 2014 to 2024. Clint was as an Assistant Attorney General, representing the State of Texas in condemnation cases and coordinated the trial advocacy training for the Office of the Attorney General. He also taught trial skills at the University of Texas School of Law in Austin. More importantly, he was a good husband, father, and friend.

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2024 Post Event Survey QR Code

Survey Monkey Link:



<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Q9ZL53Y>

Travel Reimbursement Request Form Guidelines

January 1, 2024

The Texas Court Improvement Program (CIP) is federally funded and thereby governed by the reimbursement policies of the Children's Commission and the Supreme Court of Texas. All travel expenses will be paid in accordance with the following policies.

Reimbursements for personal expenses, alcoholic beverages and gratuities are not allowed.

Reimbursement Forms

Please complete the Children's Commission Travel Reimbursement Request Form in full, sign and date. Forms with the supporting receipts attached may be submitted by email or mail to the following:

E-mail: Willette Sedwick commission.accounting@txcourts.gov

Mail: Supreme Court of Texas Children's Commission
P.O. Box 12248
Austin, TX 78711

Match Form

The Children's Commission Match form **MUST** also be completed to prevent delay in processing requests for reimbursement.

Transportation

Travelers are required to select the most cost-effective mode of transportation. Original receipts are required for transportation expenses such as parking, airfare, rental car, taxis, and shuttles.

Transportation Options

Mileage Calculation – Travelers may be reimbursed .67 cents per mile for travel by personal automobile. In determining route, the traveler must select the most cost-effective, reasonably safe, shortest route; however, may choose an alternative route according to the road conditions and/or the quickest route. To claim mileage reimbursement, requests must include driving directions generated by a mapping service such as MapQuest, Google Maps, etc. The mapping service attachment must include:

1. The traveler's headquarters address (start of trip travel) and the meeting destination;
2. line by line driving directions;
3. Includes the total one-way mileage.

Rental vs. Personal Vehicle - Travelers are responsible for determining the most cost-effective means of ground transportation. The maximum reimbursable amount for ground transportation is determined by using the Comptroller of Public Accounts mileage calculator found here: <https://fmx.cpa.texas.gov/fmx/travel/mileage/>

Rental Car - Reimbursements will be made only for the vehicle type/class with the lowest rate. A copy of the original receipt is required and must include the name of the rental company, the name of the traveler, the start and end date of the rental agreement, itemization of expenses incurred, and proof of payment.

Airfare - Reimbursement may not exceed the cost of the lowest available airfare (Economy seating or similar) between the traveler's headquarters location and duty point. Reimbursement will not be made for upgrades or early check-in/boarding. Receipts must include the name of the traveler, airline, ticket number, class of transportation, travel dates, and proof of payment. Itineraries/confirmations that show cost but not payment will not be reimbursed.

Incidentals

Original receipts are required for incidental expenses (ie. baggage fees, gasoline, internet access, tolls).

Meals

Meals are reimbursed according to the rates set by the General Services Administration. Refer to www.gsa.gov for the daily maximum meals allowance.

- Non-Overnight Travel: Traveling outside of designated headquarters for six consecutive hours or more may be reimbursed for meals not to exceed \$36.
- Overnight Travel: Meal expenses incurred for overnight travel are reimbursable up to the maximum GSA rate for the destination location. The first and last day of travel is calculated at 75 percent of the daily maximum meal allowance set by the GSA.
- Travelers may only claim meals that are not provided as part of an event. For example: at a conference, where lunch is provided to attendees, the traveler may not claim reimbursement for lunch.

Lodging

Please refer to www.gsa.gov for daily maximum lodging allowances. If you are traveling outside of your designated headquarters, the single occupancy rate plus applicable taxes for your hotel room will be reimbursed for arrival on the day before the conference or meeting through the night after the conference or meeting ends. Additional room nights, guests and incidental expenses are not reimbursable.

If you have any questions or need assistance completing the form, please contact Willette Sedwick at commission.accounting@txcourts.gov.

All reimbursement claims must be submitted within 45 days of travel.

CHILDREN'S COMMISSION

P.O. Box 12248 ~ Austin, TX 78711

512-463-1310

REIMBURSEMENT REQUEST

Please Allow 30 days for processing.

PAYEE INFORMATION:

Name: _____

Social Security Number: _____

Title: _____

Email: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Phone: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

BUSINESS PURPOSE: Please provide brief description of conference or training attended.

Attended the Children's Commission TST Contested Hearing Practices Pilot in Dallas, TX on September 25-26, 2024.

Note: Refer to travel guidelines for maximum lodging and meals allowances. Receipts and supporting documentation must be attached, including mileage calculation between headquarters and conference location.

Date	Mileage			Airfare	Rental Car	Taxi/Shuttle	Parking/ Tolls	Meals	Lodging	Misc.	Total
	Distance	Rate	Cost								
		0.67									
		0.67									
		0.67									
		0.67									
		0.67									
		0.67									

Total

I CERTIFY THAT:

1. The amounts listed are actual expenses paid personally by me for the purpose stated.
2. I have not been nor will be reimbursed from any other source for any of the expenses listed.
3. This request is correct to the best of my knowledge.

Payee Signature: _____

Date: _____

**This form may be e-signed and sent to commission.accounting@txcourts.gov. All required supporting documentation should be scanned and attached in email with form. Or, send completed form and all required documentation (tape small receipts to standard-size paper), to:
PO Box 12248, Austin, TX 78711**

For Commission Use Only

Commission Approval _____

Date _____

COMBJ _____

